got the better deal.

There was a rumor bruited about Thing Street that all pickers eventually contracted some strange wasting disease. Some suspected Crone's Disease, but Johnny thought it was something mental. No gastro-intestinal disorder made anyone that furtive and antisocial. They only communicated with lunatics and rag-peddlers, and then in a whisper, about some incredibly valuable thing they'd secreted somewhere they never revealed .

They endeavored to placate the Crypt Zombies with stale coffees from Coffeeslime. Any cheap excuse to penetrate the sanctum where they priced the things with clicking guns. They'd never been known to buy anything....

They'd loiter at the Stoned Queen waiting for the next flat of THINGS. Then Johnny'd hear them complaining that everything was too expensive. They couldn't make any money. Everybody knew they'd only flip it....

After all, they were Pickers....

They'd haggle over shrink-wrapped baby pictures. Johnny assumed they'd haggle likewise over the babies themselves. There was a market for babies....

De gustibus....

Once Johnny saw a tiny violin in the glass case under the cash register. He showed it to a Zombie. He said a picker should buy it. To go with the babies....

Something about their fat round vacantly staring faces appealed to pickers....

They watched one waddling down Rancidvale Boulevard.

Porko bet which way he'd turn. Right into the Stoned Queen.

*****

Johnny heard his paretic irregularity, returning from the BOOZE CAN favored by Cowboy.

His cane(s), tapping Citizen Hearse-Ferrari's newly installed wood-look linoleum....

At 2 A.M. (he remembered checking his watch), something woke him.

Bruce! Staggering around his tiny apartment. Johnny put on shorts and a pair of shoes, and walked down the hall. Towards the noise.

He heard voices. He thought he recognized Bruce's. Scolding his guest, for arousing Johnny. He returned to his apartment, hearing at half-minute intervals, someone striking the wall, breaking his fall with extended palm.

Before losing consciousness again....

*****

Warfarin lost his phone. Stolen! By a room-mate in his rooming house for LOST BOYS. A young Buddhist putting himself through Street Medicine School. Warafarin told them about him last week. Porko got mad. He wasn't even a dealer.

Johnny had been to that Buddhist Temple. The crummiest bar on Thing Street. The Tibetans crouched on a bench in the window, glasses of what looked like weak dish-water on the ledge. Pale, foamy. Not much head!

Warfarin went in, to the slaughter. He was certainly good at it. He emerged less his money, but with a little piece of dead plant wrapped like a mummy's thumbnail, only smaller.